

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Sam Sato, 66, camp store and restaurant owner, Puunene

Sam Sato, Japanese, was born January 20, 1914, in Waiakoa, Maui. At the age of six, he and his family moved to Camp 2, Spreckelsville. In 1933, he moved to Camp 3 and opened his store. The present Sam Sato Store and Restaurant, started in 1964, is located in Alabama Camp, Puunene.

Today, Sato enjoys golf. He is also an active member of the Republican Party.

A summary of an unrecorded interview with Sato in his store follows.

NOTES FROM UNRECORDED INTERVIEW

with

Sam Sato

January 28, 1980

Puunene, Maui

BY: Warren Nishimoto

Sam Sato Store began in Camp 3 Spreckelsville in 1933, when Sato was nineteen years old. Prior to that, he worked as a mechanic at a gas station in Lower Paia. Realizing how much money could be made in business, he wanted to purchase and run his own gas station, but none was available at the time.

He soon found a store and restaurant in Camp 3 for sale, and was persuaded by friends to take it over. Since he knew nothing about borrowing money from the bank, he asked friends to lend him the necessary capital. "I was really desperate. I wanted to go into business--any kind of business." Besides the building, Sato also took over the six or seven dollars worth of inventory left in the store. He remembers paying fifty or sixty dollars a month for rent to HC&S [Hawaiian Commerical & Sugar Company].

Sato carried canned goods, saimin made by a Chinese cook, and homemade turnovers and manjū made by his mother Mite and wife Gladys. Before World War II, daily gross sales was seven to ten dollars a day, increasing to twenty dollars a day on weekends. Saimin in those days cost ten cents a bowl. Seventy-five percent of Sato's goods came from Kahului Store. He also dealt with Maui Dry Goods, Wailuku Candy Company, Nashiwa Bakery, and Honolulu's Seiseido for Japanese drugs.

Because business was fairly slow, Sato let his mother and wife run the store while he took a job at the Camp 1 Store as assistant postmaster. He quit this post when the war broke out in 1941 in order to devote full time to the store, since servicemen stationed near Haiku and Spreckelsville would stop by in large numbers for meals. Daily gross sales mushroomed to \$200 a day. Because Sato's store was off the main street, soldiers could not loiter around the store. This, according to Sato, improved his business.

Near the war's end, Sato thought that business would begin to slow down, so he took another job at Von Hamm Young in the credit department for \$250 a month. Still, business was not as slow as it was before the war.

In 1951, Spreckelsville residents received notice that their homes were to be demolished as part of HC&S's decision to close down its plantation camps and relocate the residents to Kahului and elsewhere. Sato made plans to relocate his store to another area. In 1964, he bought the Hamada

Restaurant in Alabama Camp, Puunene, thus being one of the last residents to move out of Spreckelsville. Since the housing areas surrounding the Puunene Mill--Alabama Camp, Mill Camp, and McGerrow Camp--are still last on the list of camps scheduled for demolition by HC&S, Sato has been able to continue his business to this day.

Today, at Sam Sato Store and Restaurant, business is still thriving. Besides the regular HC&S employee clientele, the restaurant attracts both Kahului and Wailuku lunch-time crowds, as well as out-of-towners hoping to sample and bring home some of Sato's famous manjū. Daily gross sales today reach \$500 on weekdays and \$1,000 on weekends. Sato in 1969 left his job at Von Hamm Young in order to spend more time with the business. His wife and ninety-five-year-old mother still work tirelessly in the kitchen, and the menu has been expanded to include a variety of plate lunches.

There is no definite future for Sam Sato Store and Restaurant. His daughter would like to take over, but Sato advises against it. Today, the high costs of operating a small business, the uncertain future of Alabama Camp, and the long, twelve-hour days are the main reasons for Sato's opposition.

**STORES and
STOREKEEPERS of
Paia & Puunene, Maui**

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